

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 06369

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, NATO, GW, BE, US
SUBJECT: SHAPE-EUCOM COLLOCATION

REF: BRUSSELS 5933

1. SUMMARY. DURING COURSE LONG DISCUSSION MARCH 31 FOLLOWING UP ON COMMENTS REPORTED REFTEL, BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY CHIEF OF NATO AFFAIRS, ERIK BAL, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF FOREIGN MINISTRY AND DEFENSE MINISTRY, TOLD US THAT "FOR THE TIME BEING, AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE," BELGIAN REPLY TO USG REQUEST FOR WARTIME SHAPE-EUCOM COLLOCATION IS "NO." BAL MADE CLEAR BELGIAN DESIRE THAT WE NOT FORCE THEM TO SAY NO FORMALLY; THAT THERE BE NO LEAKS OR PUBLICITY THAT COULD BE INTERPRETED AS PRESSURE AND WHICH WOULD WEAKEN ALLIANCE (AND EMBARRASS BELGIUM); AND THAT ISSUE IN EFFECT BE PUT ON SHELF PENDING "EVOLUTION OF GENERAL POLITICAL CONTEXT" THAT COULD PERMIT FAVORABLE DECISION. HE DID NOT HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE FOR LATTE, NOR DO WE. END SUMMARY.

2. SPEAKING FROM NOTES AT OPENING OF TOUR D'HORIZON ON POLITICO-CONFIDENTIAL

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MILITARY QUESTIONS AND IN PRESENCE OF HIS DEPUTY (WHO TOOK COPIOUS NOTES), BAL DISCUSSED EUCOM COLLOCATION IN TERMS OF WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS TIMING, PUBLICITY, AND BASIC ISSUES.

A. TIMING. CITING EXCHANGE BETWEEN MFA CHEF DE CABINET DAVIGNON AND DCM RENNER ON DECEMBER 24, 1976, BAL SAID THAT POLITICAL CONTEXT IS NOW MUCH MORE DIFFICULT WITH MANY OTHER POLITICO-MILITARY QUESTIONS (E.G. ERW, HAWK HELIP) UNDER CONSIDERATION. THESE PROBLEMS HAVE NO

DIRECT CONNECTION WITH COLLOCATION BUT MAKE POLITICAL CONTEXT DIFFICULT. MUCH HAS TO BE DONE BEFORE NATO SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON. COLLOCATION ISSUE COULD NOT BE HANDLED WITHOUT BEING RAISED IN PARLIAMENT GIVEN BELGIAN GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT DURING 1966 PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON SHAPE TRANSFER THAT IT WOULD BE PRUDENT REGARDING ACCEPTANCE

OF ADDITIONAL MILITARY INSTALLATIONS. IF COLLOCATION QUESTION WERE RAISED NOW, IT WOULD RISK PRODUCING A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON OTHER PROBLEMS. THUS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES. IT IS IMPORTANT, IN PARTICULAR, THAT ALLIES APPEAR MORE UNITED AT WASHINGTON NATO SUMMIT THAN THEY DO NOW.

B. PUBLICITY. BAL REPEATED POINTS REPORTED REFTEL, STRESSING DANGER OF ANY PRESS LEAKS. WE GAVE ASSURANCES BASED ON STATE 77908. BAL ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN RE POSSIBLE CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS OR LEAK FROM SOME ORGANIZATION SUCH AS GAO, SAYING ANY PUBLICITY COULD BE INTERPRETED AS PRESSURE ON BELGIANS. THIS WOULD ADD TO TROUBLES AMONG ALLIES.

C. BASIC ISSUES. BAL CITED ORIGINAL BELGIAN REPLY IN DAVIGNON STATEMENT IN 1976 TO DCM RENNER: "WE ARE RELUCTANT TO SAY WHETHER IT CAN BE DONE OR NOT. WE ARE NOT READY TO SAY "NO". THIS WAS ANSWER TO FIRST VERSION OF PROPOSAL. SINCE THEN, USG HAS

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MODIFIED PROPOSAL (LIMITING IT TO WARTIME COLLOCATION). BELGIUM, SAID BAL, DOES NOT SAY NO, BUT CANNOT GIVE US HOPE OF AGREEMENT IN NEAR FUTURE. ITS FINAL ANSWER WILL DEPEND ON EVOLUTION OF GENERAL POLITICAL

CONTEXT. BAL THEN QUOTED DAVIGNON AS HAVING SAID THAT IF BELGIANS SAID NO, AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND. WE AGREED. BAL SAID THAT HE ALSO AGREED. BAL SAID BELGIANS WOULD CONTINUE TO EXAMINE THE QUESTION BUT THAT NO REPLY COULD BE EXPECTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

3. IN REPLY TO QUESTION, BAL SAID THAT HE DID NOT FORECLOSE AN EVENTUAL POSITIVE RESPONSE, BUT HE CLEARLY WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC. HE NOTED THAT BELGIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATO ALLIANCE HAVE INCLUDED NATO AND SHAPE HEADQUARTERS. HE ALSO STRESSED ATTACHMENT OF BELGIUM TO NATO.

4. BAL THEN MADE PLEA THAT WE AVOID PRESSURE, WHETHER DIRECT OR INDIRECT, AND REPEATED POINT THAT WE AVOID ANY PUBLICITY THAT COULD BE INTERPRETED AS PRESSURE.

5. AFTER BAL REPEATED NEED FOR ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES, WE ASKED HIM FOR HIS ESTIMATE OF CHANCES FOR APPROVAL WHEN AND IF OTHER POLITICO-MILITARY ISSUES ARE SETTLED. HE SAID HE COULD MAKE NO COMMITMENT.

6. BAL THEN STRESSED DELICACY OF ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTRA-

ALLIANCE RELATIONS. IF IT SHOULD BECOME KNOWN THAT BELGIUM HAD FELT COMPELLED TO TURN DOWN AMERICAN PROPOSAL, HE SAID, THIS WOULD CAUSE STILL ONE MORE PROBLEM FOR ALLIANCE.

6. ASKED FOR SUMMARY OF BELGIAN POSITION, BAL SAID "FOR THE TIME BEING, AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, "THE ANSWER IS "NO." QUESTION WILL BE KEPT "UNDER STUDY," AND "WE WILL SEE."

7. COMMENT. MUCH OF BAL'S PRESENTATION WAS INHERENT IN HIS STATEMENTS REPORTED EARLIER, BUT THIS TIME HE MADE CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOW SPEAKING ON INSTRUCTIONS OF HIGHEST AUTHORITIES IN MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AND DEFENSE. BELGIANS HAVE "GRASPED THE NETTLE" BY ASKING US TO PUT PROBLEM ON SHELF AND NOT FORCE THEM TO SAY NO. THEY NOW CLEARLY HOPE THAT THIS PARTICULAR POLITICO-MILITARY PROBLEM WILL JUST GO AWAY. GIVEN CURRENT BELGIAN POSITION WE SEE NO REASON TO HOPE FOR A FAVORABLE
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BELGIAN DECISION FOR FORSEEABLE, AND NOT JUST NEAR, FUTURE. CHAMBERS

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